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1517, and all that: dating the beginning of the Reformation in Early Modern Britain and France

English Evangelical Historians on the Origins of “the Reformation”

Les origines de la Réforme anglaise vue par les historiens protestants

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Résumés

English Français
Although Luther’s protest of indulgences in 1517 is often considered to be the point of origin for “the Reformation”, first- and second-generation English evangelicals understood that origin differently. Knowing their fledgling movement needed to be grounded in history for legitimacy, evangelicals searched historical records for evidence of their movement prior to Luther’s protest. This essay examines the work of two leading historians during the English Reformation, John Bale (d. 1563) and John Foxe (d. 1587), to analyze what they made of the beginnings of the English Reformation. Specifically, it explores the place of the lollards, late medieval English dissenters condemned by the Church, in the histories written by Bale and Foxe between the 1540s and 1570. It argues that Bale and Foxe saw their own reform movement through an apocalyptic prism; reading the historical records through the light of Scripture, especially the Book of Revelation, led them to recognize the career of John Wyclif (d. 1384), the putative progenitor of the lollards, as the beginning of the final age of the world. Alongside Bale and Foxe, Luther, William Tyndale (d. 1536) were living at the end of that age. The essay concludes that early English evangelicals understood “the Reformation” to be a process, not a single event, and this is further demonstrated by a brief case study examining the issue of vernacular Scripture in the reform movement.

Si la dénonciation des indulgences par Luther en 1517 est souvent entendue comme l’origine de la Réforme, les premières générations de réformateurs anglais voyaient les choses d’un autre œil. Afin de donner à leur mouvement naissant une légitimité historique, ils épluchaient les sources historiques pour y trouver les preuves que les origines de celui-ci remontaient plus loin que Luther. Cet article se penche sur ce que les deux principaux historiens qui ont écrit pendant la Réforme, John Bale († 1563) et John Foxe († 1587) ont dit des origines de la Réforme, et en particulier sur le rôle qu’ils ont attribué aux lollards, un réseau d’hérétiques anglais de la fin du Moyen Âge. Bale et Foxe faisaient de la Réforme et de leur temps une lecture apocalyptique. Leur lecture des sources historiques à la lumière de la Bible, et en particulier de l’Apocalypse, les a conduits à considérer la carrière de John Wyclif († 1384), le père putatif du mouvement lollard, comme marquant le début de la fin des temps. Bale, Foxe, et William Tyndale († 1536) pensaient

vivre la fin de l’ère que leur prédécesseur avait inaugurée. Enfin, l’article se conclut sur l’idée que les réformateurs anglais voyaient bien la Réforme comme un processus, plutôt que comme un événement, une interprétation que confirme l’importance que les réformateurs ont accordé à l’usage de la Bible en langue vernaculaire par leurs prédécesseurs dans la vraie foi.

Entrées d’index

Mots-clés : Acts and Monuments, Antéchrist, apocalyptique, John Bale, John Foxe, lollards, papauté, pensée.
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Texte intégral

Introduction

1 The quincentenary of Martin Luther’s protest of indulgences on 31 October 1517 is being marked with exhibitions, academic conferences, and religious services. This date has come to be seen as the initiation of the Reformation event and, as Thomas Albert Howard has recently shown, the 500th anniversary will follow other centenary celebrations in 1617, 1717, 1817, and 1917.[1] These celebrations, in fact, reflected ongoing acts of Protestant commemoration; from its very beginning, the reform movement which spread across Europe in the sixteenth century was a self-reflective one, analyzing its origins and future.[2]

2 But for most reformers, Luther’s *Thesenanschlag* could not be seen as the “beginning” of the Reformation; such a claim left them open to accusations of novelty, a byword for illegitimacy in the traditional intellectual culture of the sixteenth century. In the belief that a true church had to be ancient and universal, Catholics mocked Protestants with the damning accusation of novelty, a rhetorical ploy that nevertheless had a ring of truth to it.[3] So Protestants dug into the historical records, hoping to find evidence of the longevity of their faith.

3 For the English evangelical historians John Bale (1495-1563) and John Foxe (1516/1517-1587), who were convinced by the historical proof they found in the archives, Luther’s protest movement was the latest iteration of a reform effort that had existed throughout the Middle Ages. This article will detail their interpretation of the role of the lollards, medieval dissenters accused of heresy, in a reform movement which stretched back to the late fourteenth century. It will show that evangelical understanding of these historical processes was driven by an apocalyptic interpretation of the past, which saw the development of the world in stages, the last of which would culminate in Christ’s return. It is this last stage in which English reformers understood themselves to be living, in which Luther appears not as its beginning, but its near culmination. This narrative arc can be seen clearly in the case of vernacular scripture in print, so the article will finish with a focused look at that issue in particular.

The lollards

4 The loosely connected groups of late medieval English heretics whom scholars call “lollards” have been a topic of contentious debate for centuries. Notoriously difficult to define, lollard heresy was, in broad terms, characterized by the rejection of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[4] In addition to denying transubstantiation, lollards generally denied the salvific effects of pilgrimages and auricular confession and were noted for their critique of the clergy. They are best known for their preference for the vernacular scripture over the Vulgate; their English version was widely circulated. The

lollard critiques of late medieval piety were based on the ideas of John Wyclif and other scholars at Oxford in the 1370s.

5 The relationship between Wyclif and later dissenters has received robust and ongoing attention. By the mid-twentieth century, the story of the lollards ran thus: after being suppressed by secular and ecclesiastical authorities, the lollards were forced to hide their beliefs in order to avoid detection, and this suppression eradicated any favor in the university or aristocratic circles. Without learned leaders to drive the movement, Wycliffite beliefs became corrupted and simplified. Although this argument is slightly oversimplified, this general narrative was espoused by K.B. MacFarlane. It was vigorously refuted by Anne Hudson's magisterial *The Premature Reformation*, which argued through a close analysis of Wycliffite texts that lollardy could be seen as a movement, founded by Wyclif but in continuous existence and fueled by a constant flow of vernacular treatises. Hudson's work, while nuanced by other scholars, remained largely unchallenged until the next major monograph to specifically address lollard theology appeared. In *What Is a Lollard?*, Patrick Hornbeck argues that Hudson's case was put too strongly, and he traces doctrinal differences chronologically through different lollard groups, from Wyclif's day to the sixteenth century.[5] Hornbeck's monograph was squarely focused on lollard beliefs, a turn from the scholarly tendency to examine the lollards through their socio-economic networks or book circulation.[6]

6 The lollards were ripe for appropriation by early evangelicals, mainly on the basis of shared beliefs. The lollard favor of vernacular Scriptures and rejection of transubstantiation, auricular confession, and pilgrimages have been mentioned already; reformers also would have recognized lollard appeals against images and the veneration of saints, as well as calls for the reform of the clergy. The lollards repudiated clerical celibacy and identified the papacy as antichrist, both of which chimed with evangelicals.[7]

7 In other ways, the medieval dissenters might seem imperfectly reformed. There were many examples where lollard views might seem too conservative for evangelicals, and other cases where they appeared to go too far in tearing down traditional piety. Varying lollard perspectives on the Virgin Mary will serve to illustrate the point. Anne Hudson shows that lollards expressed doubts about many aspects of the Virgin, including whether she birthed another child after Christ's ascension,[8] and John Davis shows that lollards questioned if Christ took flesh of Mary. The London lollard Thomas Man was accused of having "blasphemed our blessed Ladie, calling her, Mablye". Those who prayed to Mary include Alice Atkyns of the Chiltern lollards, who knew her Ave Maria in English; also, the wife of Robert Pope was accused of having a "boke of the seruice of the Virgine Marie in English". Some lollards prayed to Mary – which evangelicals rejected as idolatrous – while others denigrated her, which also would have been unpalatable to evangelicals.[9]

8 Nevertheless, in the lollards evangelicals recognized kindred spirits, and combed through court books which archived lollard trial documents, searched bishops' registers in which clerks had recorded the beliefs of those accused of heresy, and even consulted living people who remembered those in their communities who had been persecuted or had performed penance for heresy. John Bale consulted John Wyclif's own writings, including *De veritate scriptura* at Queen's College, Cambridge, as well as *De fide catholica*, and *De eucharistica confessio*, but used far more often were sources that were hostile to Wyclif and his followers. Included in this category were Thomas Netter's influential *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei ecclesiae catholicae*, printed in Paris between 1521 and 1532, and Ortwin *Gratius' Fasciculis Rerum expetendarum et fugiendarum*, published at Cologne in 1525.[10] The medieval chronicles served as another source of information about Wyclif and his followers. Polydore Vergil's *Anglica historia* (1534), Edward Hall's *The vnion of the two noble and illustrate famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke* (1548, 1550), Fabian's chronicle (printed several times in the 1540s and 1550s), and Walsingham's chronicles (1574) each contained information about the early lollards. There were also early modern printings of "lollard" texts.[11] The earliest tracts that appeared in print (excepting Wyclif's *Trialogus* and a version of the Wycliffite *Opus Arduum*) were published in the early 1530s in Antwerp, from the same press responsible for Tyndale's works.[12] Anne Hudson's research has ably covered these texts,

their editors, the presses they emerged from, and their medieval exemplars.[13] Crucial to Bale’s research was a manuscript compiled throughout the late fourteenth and early- to mid-fifteenth century, to which Thomas Netter contributed (and to whom it is usually attributed); it was kept by his Carmelite order in Norfolk (the same order that Bale entered c.1514) as an account of their efforts against heterodoxy, the *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*.[14]

9 In addition, people could consult the medieval trial documents that Foxe himself examined. The lollard narratives form Book Five to Book Eight of the second edition of *Acts and Monuments* (1570), in which far more lollard material is present than in the first edition of 1563. While some text had appeared in the 1563 edition from *A compendious olde treatyse, shewynge howe that we oughte to haue ye scripture in Englysshe* (printed in 1530), two other lollard works printed by early evangelicals were incorporated into Foxe’s 1570 edition: part of *Jack Upland* and the entirety of *The praier and complaynte of the ploweman vnto Christe*, as stated above. He also expanded his treatment of the early lollard adherents such as Nicholas Hereford, William Swinderby, Walter Brute (with additional material from the register of Bishop John Trefnant of Hereford[15]), and in bishops’ registers he found entire new communities of lollards in Leicester (from Archbishop William Courtenay’s visitation of Leicester[16]), Norwich (a court-book now Westminster Diocesan Archives MS. B.2[17]), Coventry (which he had known and written about in the *Rerum*, but about which he received additional information from locals[18]), Kent (register of Archbishop William Warham of Canterbury[19]), London (through a court-book of Bishop Fitzjames or diocesan court-books no longer extant[20]), and the diocese of Lincoln (via court-books that are now lost[21]).

John Bale

10 The English evangelical understanding of history is best found in the works of the movement’s most accomplished historian, John Bale. His evangelical religious opinions shaped his understanding of the past, and even his dramatic writings worked as polemic, with *King Johan* (1538) telling the story of a legitimate monarch whose rule was disrupted by an international conspiracy originating in Rome.[22] Bale’s *The image of bothe Churches* (the first part of which was published in 1545) depicted Christian history as epic battle between the true Church and the false Church (led by the Antichrist, the bishops of Rome), and his *The actes of Englysh votaryes* (1546) filled in this framework with case studies from English history.[23] In this latter work, Bale linked the sixteenth-century evangelical movement to early English Christians who had resisted Roman authority since Augustine’s mission arrived in England in the late sixth century. By doing this, he attempted to associate his co-religionists with other godly members of the true Church throughout each age of history, identifying these witnesses as the apostolic remnant from a purer time of the Church. One way that Bale identified these historical members of the true Church was the suffering they had endured at the hands of the authorities His works depicted the punishment of heretics as a cruelty distinctly antithetical to a true Church. Bale tied the evangelical martyrs of his day to those of the early Church in works such as *The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe* and the *Brefe Chronycle*.[24] The distinctly historical nature of Bale’s writings was not merely significant for its revision of the past, but also for its revision of the future. Bale’s *Image* was a commentary on the Book of Revelation, and in it the reformer advocated an apocalyptic interpretation of times to come. The eschatological tenor of this work also pervades Bale’s other texts, and heavily influenced the writings of Foxe.[25]

11 Bale’s understanding of the past was governed by a strong belief in the correct interpretation of prophecy. Before any other source, he turned to the Bible for knowledge of the past. He asserted that the Word is a full clerenes to all the cronicles and moste notable hystories which hath bene writen sens Christes ascension, openynge the true naturs of their ages tymes, and seasons. He that hath store of them, and shall

diligently serche them ouer conferring the one with the other, tyme with tyme, and age with age shal perceyue most wonderful causes.[26]

12 Bale believed that history could be understood by using prophetic Scripture as an hermeneutical tool, and he applied this to England's history in particular. While the *Image* contains examples from the continent (mostly Germany) and England, his *Actes of Englysh votaryes* and the *Brefe Chronycle* include passing mention to occasional figures from the continent (especially John Hus, the Bohemian reformer condemned to death by the bishops at the Council of Constance in 1415) but are chiefly concerned to give an account of England's past. This past was illuminated in episodes that paralleled the history of the Israelites, and had the same repetitive, redemptive quality.

13 Bale's understanding of Christian history is most clearly expressed in his commentary on the Book of Revelation, *The image of bothe churches* (1545). He believed that the Bible served as a mirror to the history of the world, and his exegesis was informed by its topoi of the Antichrist, the Lamb of God, the body of believers, and exile. *The image of bothe churches* interpreted the seven seal openings of Revelation as the seven ages of the world, and depicted each age as a struggle between the true church and the false church—a theme as old as Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei*.[27] Bale retold the story in light of his present-day plight in exile, expressing kinship with St. John, to whom the Book of Revelation was attributed at the time, and who claimed he wrote the work in exile at Patmos.[28]

14 Bale's exegesis of the seven seals' openings did not come with exact dates; rather, each seal opening represented God's truth revealed at various (often vague, and indeed overlapping) times. The first seal represented Christ and his apostles, who brought the Word to the world, and the second seal opening occurred after the first heresies plagued the Church, when God sent exemplars such as Polycarp and Justin Martyr. The third seal opening denoted an era of increasing heresy, including Donatism and Arianism. The time of the fourth seal opening saw the growth of the power of Muhammad and the Pope, and readers could see for the first time the hypocrites and false priests that adhered to the church of the Antichrist. Significantly, Bale recognized that these were times of the Antichrist because after "the tyme of Berengarius in the Waldeanes, publicans and Albigeances", it was not possible "without superstycion to confesse the name and verity of Christ".[29] Bale, then, saw the increasing corruption of the Church as simultaneous with the growth of extra-Biblical ceremonies in the liturgy. The fifth seal opening was concurrent with the fourth; instead of showing the enemies of Christ, his true disciples were depicted. Bale believed he was living in the sixth age, and that the sixth seal opening coincided with Wyclif's teachings; he associated the earthquake at the opening of the sixth seal with the "Earthquake Synod" of 1382, when Wyclif's twenty-four propositions had been condemned. Bale noted that this latter age would bring on a renewal of martyrdom, and characterized the martyrs of his own day as fulfilling that prophecy. The seventh seal, which Bale believed was yet to come, would see Satan bound for one thousand years, and a time of peace in the Church.

15 Bale's sense of history drove and shaped his formulations for the future. As has been noted by several authors, Bale's interests lay firmly in the past and not in the times to come.[30] He often referred to his own time as the "latter age" of the world, and perceived of it as the stage for the last battle in an epic war between the true and false Churches. He claimed that the reform movement of his era fulfilled the prophecy of the wounded Antichrist, which came about from the preaching of the true gospel, stressing that already in England and Germany, the pope's authority had been cast aside. Bale's *Image* told of three predictions of Revelation: the people would hate the Antichrist's laws; they would reject his authority; and they would turn away from his customs.[31] Bale then demonstrated that princes had already turned from the Antichrist (including the Kings of England and Denmark, the Duke of Saxon, and the Landgrave of Hesse), as well as bishops (including the Bishops of Chester, Westminster, Salisbury and Worcester), and both English and continental reformers.[32] With the first part of this process in motion, Bale predicted that next, the Antichrist's authority would continue to be eroded because reformers had questioned the established Church's scriptural interpretations, and he claimed that thirdly, people had stopped believing in the efficacy of the pope's ceremonies – without which, he was nothing.[33]

16 Bale warned, though, that the Antichrist was not at present mortally wounded, and a great number of people would keep the laws of the false faith. He cited the Acts of Six Articles, a reversal of the recent evangelical trajectory in religious policy in 1539, as evidence that this prophecy had been realized, and claimed that the reassertion of traditional eucharistic doctrine by Parliament and the survival of Stephen Gardiner and Cuthbert Tunstall in their bishoprics showed that the Antichrist’s injury was in fact healing.[34] Bale understood these events as indicative of an approaching end to the world and the coming of God’s judgment.

John Foxe

17 Foxe’s own eschatological scheme developed later than that of Bale. It was only in the 1563 edition of *Acts and Monuments* that he recognized the date 1000 as the time when Satan had been loosed.[35] By the time the 1570 edition had been published, this was reconfigured to the year 1294, one thousand years since the end of the early church persecutions.[36] He followed Bale’s belief that there had been a precipitous moral decline of the Church from the era of Gregory the Great’s pontificate, around 600. Four hundred years later marked the ascendancy of the Pope and the Turk, two powerful enemies to the true Church. The first century under Antichrist, however, was that of Wyclif. Foxe marked 1360 (the supposed composition date of *The praier and complaynte of the ploweman*) as a new age of increased persecutions, an age that had extended until Elizabeth’s reign.[37]

18 The way Foxe edited these lollard materials provides clues to what Foxe made of the lollards. When Foxe discussed Wyclif, he hailed him as a sign of the beginning of the Reformation; he read the schoolman’s opposition to the papacy alongside anticlerical works like *The praier and complaynt of the ploweman*, which to him signified the loosening of Satan and the dawn of an age of renewed persecution.[38] Foxe, then, did not necessarily account the lollards to be direct followers of Wyclif, part of a single reform movement as described by Anne Hudson.[39] Foxe identified Wyclif’s lifetime as the dawn of an era of reform, rather than seeing Wyclif himself as the direct progenitor of the lollards. In the preface to the second edition of *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe detailed the gradual decline of the Roman Church, describing Wyclif’s appearance at its nadir:

> To discend now somewhat lower in drawing out the descent of the Church. What a multitude here commeth of faithful witnesses in the *time of Ioh. Wickleffe*, as Ocliffe, Wickleffe an. 1376. W. Thorpe, White, Puruey, Patshall, Payne, Gower, Chauser, Gascoyne, William Swynderby, Walter Brute, Roger Dexter, William Sautry about the yeare. 1400. Iohn Badby, an. 1410. Nicholas Tayler, Rich. Wagstaffe, Mich. Scriuener, W. Smith, Iohn Henry, W. Parchmenar, Roger Goldsmith [...] Lord Cobham, Syr Roger Acton Knight, Iohn Beuerlay preacher [...] with whom I might also adioyne Laurentius Valla, and Ioannes Picus [...] But what do I stand vpon recitall of names, which almost are infinite.[40]

19 Foxe, then, recognized each of these men as inspired by the Holy Spirit to continue the fight against the false Church: that this list includes knights, preachers, martyrs, and medieval and humanist scholars underscores that Foxe considered them individual witnesses to the true church, not mere disciples of Wyclif. In many places in *Acts and Monuments* where Foxe described the trials of later lollards, there seem to be few links with other lollards, such as the case of Richard Turmin and John Claydon.[41] The Amersham lollard accounts make no reference to Wyclif at all, except to mention some who read *Wickleffes Wicket*, a treatise against transubstantiation, and neither the narratives of the lollards in Kent nor Coventry make mention of Wyclif. Foxe recorded that the Londoner John Stilman “praysed Iohn Wickleffe, affirmyng that he was a saint in heauen, and that hys booke called the Wicket, was good and holy”, but this seems to be one of very few cases.[42] When discussing disapproval of Richard II in the capital, Foxe did claim that this was because “Londoners at that tyme were notoriously knowen to be fauourers of Wyckliffes side”, but even here, the term “Wyckliffes side” suggests a multitude of individuals rather than a strict devotion to Wyclif himself.[43] More than

merely Wyclif’s followers, Foxe saw these men and women as individuals inspired by the Holy Spirit who were then proven by the persecution they endured at the hands of the established church.[44]

20 In fact, use of phrases like “witnesses in the time of Ioh. Wickleffe” or “fauourers of Wyckliffes side” likely reflect a reluctance to use the term “lollard”. Although the murky origins of the term have been the topic of debate among scholars, Foxe attributed the phrase of opprobrium to the papacy: “lollardes, by the popes interpretation is a worde deriued of Lollium”, Latin for “tare”.[45] This reference was drawn from the Parable of the Tares in Matthew 13, and it marked late medieval dissenters (along with a host of others with eccentric beliefs) as evil. Consequently, when Foxe used the term, he usually distanced himself from it, making clear that he was quoting a register, or that the Catholic Church had cruelly branded these people in such a way.[46]

21 Consistent with his recognition of Wyclif’s age as the beginning of the reform movement, Foxe perceived many aspects of that era as a part of an overarching effort for reform.[47] Figuring that a sermon by Thomas Wimbledon given at Paul’s Cross “by the auncientnes of the phrase seemeth to be preached much aboute the tyme of Iohn Wickleffe”, Foxe explained his editorial decision to place it close to William Thorpe’s testimony, “for the apte coherence both of the spirit, and of the matter”.[48] Trusting Bale’s ascriptions in the *Index Britanniae scriptorum* (1557), Foxe identified Chaucer as the author of many anticlerical works, including *The praier and complaynt of the ploweman vnto Christ*.[49] In these writings and those of John Gower, he interpreted reform-minded sentiments that predated those of his contemporaries, and declared Chaucer to be “a right VVicleuian”.[50] Rather than signifying any direct allegiance to the theological claims of Wyclif himself, this designation likely signified the author as part of Wyclif’s age, an era that Bale and Foxe saw as igniting the push for ecclesiastical reform that they understood themselves to be completing. This is underscored in the story of Peter Pateshull (fl. 1387), an Augustinian friar who, “hearing the doctrine of Iohn Wickleffe *and other of the same sorte*”, began preaching against his former order; here, Foxe attributes Pateshull’s change of heart not merely to Wyclif but to others as well, giving the idea of a larger climate of reform in that era.[51] Evangelicals also understood that time to be an age of reform because it fitted into their apocalyptic ideas, which considered Wyclif’s teachings to herald a period which would culminate in a final battle between the true church and the false church.

22 While Wyclif’s was seen as an epoch of reformation, Foxe stressed its place as part of a long strand of dissent reaching back to the pure early church. The lollards were merely one group in among many medieval witnesses, with the Hussites, Waldensians, and Cathars also playing significant parts of the narrative; this was supplemented by the odd prophecy or outspoken opponent of transubstantiation.[52] Foxe’s lineage of dissenting succession worked to provide a framework into which Luther, inspired by the Holy Spirit, fitted neatly.

The Vernacular Bible

23 The evangelical portrait painted by Bale and Foxe can be seen in microcosm in the issue of the vernacular Bible. For evangelicals, the lollards’ opposition to traditional piety in the form of extra-biblical ceremonies and rituals was just one emblem of the holiness attached to these groups. Their passion for reading Scripture in the vernacular, well before William Tyndale’s 1526 English New Testament was printed, was evidence enough of the reformers’ own religious opinions in the period when the hegemony of the Roman Church was at its most powerful, prior to Luther's protest. In Book Five of *Acts and Monuments*, Foxe begins by setting the stage for John Wyclif and his reform movement, detailing the depraved and corrupt status of the late fourteenth-century English church. This time of disorder, when man’s will superseded that of God, was for Foxe the natural consequence of a church in which “the simple and vnlearned people [were] farre from all knowledge of the holy scripture.”[53]

24 Wyclif and his followers, however, were an exception to this rule. By the time word of Luther's reforms had reached England, vernacular scripture in that part of the world had come to be associated with Wyclif's movement. The "Wycliffite Bible", perhaps misleadingly-titled because it was likely translated by John Purvey and others within Wyclif's inner circle, was an idiomatic revision of a literal translation that circulated in manuscript among lollard groups.[54] Translated scripture became heavily censored by the *Constitutions* of Archbishop Thomas Arundel (1353-1414) issued in 1409, which were translated and incorporated into *Acts and Monuments*.[55] Termed "A cruell constitution by the Archb[ishop] against the Gospellers" by Foxe, the prohibition of vernacular scripture is detailed (and relatively lightly annotated in the margins) for his readers:

> [N]o man hereafter by his owne authoritie, translate any text of the Scripture into English, or any other tounge by way of a boke, libell, or treatise: and that no man read any such boke, libell, or treatise, now lately set forth in the tyme of Iohn Wickleffe, or sithens…vntill þe sayd translation be allowed by the ordinary of the place…He that shall do contrary to this, shall likewise be punished as a fauourer of…heresie.[56]

25 Foxe notes that the intention behind this article and the others of the *Constitutions* (which prohibited preaching without a license and restricted sermon content to only those opinions that agreed with official Church teachings) was "that the name and memory of this persecuted sort, shoulde vtterly haue bene rooted vp, and neuer could haue stand", but, remarkably and by the grace of God, the opposite occurred. Foxe writes, "And yet such be the workes of the lord, passing all mens admiration, all this notwithstanding so farre was it of, that the number & courage of these good men was vanquished, that rather they multiplied dayly and encreased."[57] That God would not merely sustain this group but encourage it to grow was, for Foxe, proof that he and his co-religionists were connected to the lollards by the Holy Spirit, sent by God into the world to preserve a remnant of his apostolic Church.

26 This increase, according to Foxe, was evident in the escalated persecution in the aftermath of the publication of Arundel's *Constitutions*. While the lollard preference for vernacular Scripture served to underscore the holiness of these dissenters in the eyes of sixteenth-century reformers, the fact that those dissenters were persecuted for this cause reinforced their value as witnesses. Foxe remarked that "reading Scripture bookes in Englishe" was one of four ways the lollards of Buckinghamshire stood in opposition to Rome (alongside their rejection of pilgrimages, adoration of saints, and transubstantiation)[58], and elsewhere highlights this as the signature cause for which they were executed. Foxe's words on this matter (which were new to the 1570 edition, comprising part of a response to a Catholic polemical opponent who had attacked Foxe's first edition) are worth quoting in full:

> Or els why dyd the good Martyrs of Amers[h]am [Buckinghamshire] suffer death, in the beginning of K. Henry the 8. for hauyng & readyng certain bookes of scripture, which were (as is sayd) only iiij. Epistles of S. Paule, with certaine other prayers. And the other which heard them but only read, did beare fagots, & the same time, the children compelled to set fagottes vnto their fathers, at which time Longland beyng then Byshop of Lincolne, and preaching to them at the stake, sayd: that what soeuer they were, that did but moue his lyppes in readyng those chapters, were damned for euer.

27 Here, then, long before Luther, was not merely evidence of vernacular Scripture reading, but examples of constant martyrs paying the ultimate cost for it. This evidence would be mirrored in the work and life of Tyndale, whose efforts at reforming the church, especially by providing a vernacular translation of the New Testament, garnered for him the title of "Apostle of England" from Foxe.[59] Just as the Holy Spirit's enlightenment of the lollards had been interpreted as God acting in history, Foxe also understood Tyndale's translation, sustained through the advent of print, to have been providentially bestowed.[60] Tyndale, though, does not appear *ex nihilo*, but rather emerges among a groundswell of reform that had been gaining momentum since the time of Wyclif.

Conclusion

28 So when Catholic controversialists taunted, “Where was your church before Luther?”, Bale and Foxe explicitly pointed to the lollards.[61] The existence of kindred spirits who, crucially, had been persecuted for many of the same beliefs as their contemporary brethren held, served to legitimate the evangelical movement in historical terms. Though Martin Luther was, of course, seen as an inspirational and transformative figure in the movement toward reform, it was in fact John Wyclif “through whom, the lord would first waken and raise vp agayn the world”, according to English evangelicals.[62] Bale and Foxe had searched the records and compared them to Scripture in order to interpret the past and, driven by their apocalyptic vision of the future, had recognized Wyclif and his followers as the beginning of the end. Viewed this way, Luther’s protest represented a capstone for the evangelical movement which was, according to Bale and Foxe, rushing toward its completion. These two influential historians, emblematic of the first and second generations of English reformers, saw the Reformation not as an event, such as Luther’s *Thesenanschlag*, but an ongoing process – one in which the lollards played a crucial early part.

Notes

1 Thomas Albert Howard, Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

2 The literature on this is extensive. A few examples: Irena Backus, Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation, 1378-1615, Leiden, Brill, 2003; Thomas S. Freeman, “The Power of Polemic: Catholic Attacks on the Calendar of Martyrs in John Foxe’s Acts and Monuments”, Journal of Ecclesiastical History 61, 2010, p. 475-495; Bruce Gordon, ed., Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, Aldershot, Scholar Press, 1996; Helen Parish, Monks, Miracles, and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church, London, Routledge, 2005; Arnoud S. Q. Visser, Reading Augustine in the Reformation: The Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500-1620, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011; Katherine Van Liere, Simon Ditchfield, and Howard Louthan, eds., Sacred History: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.

3 See, for instance, Thomas More, The confutacyon of Tyndales answers (1532), sigs. A3v, Ee3v.

4 These groups of dissenters have been so difficult to categorize that even the nomenclature to describe them is a source of debate. Following Patrick Hornbeck, I will use the traditional term, “lollard”, but with a lowercase “l”. This parallels a trend in studies of nonconformity in the late sixteenth century where scholars have adopted the use of “puritan” and “presbyterian” with a lowercase “p”, as in, for instance, Peter Lake, Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; Polly Ha, English Presbyterianism, 1590-1640, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. See J. Patrick Hornbeck II, What Is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 3-10.

5 See K. B. MacFarlane, John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity, London, The English Universities Press Ltd, 1952; Anne Hudson, The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988; Hornbeck, op. cit.

6 Among numerous others, see the work of Maureen Jurkowski, for instance her “Lollard Networks” in Wycliffite Controversies, eds. Mishtooni Bose and J. Patrick Hornbeck II, Turnhout, Brepols, 2011, 61-78; Shannon McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995; Derek Plumb, “The Social and Economic Status of the Later Lollards” in The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725, ed. Margaret Spufford, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 103-131. In line with Hornbeck’s turn to lollard beliefs, see Fiona Somerset, Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings After Wyclif, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2016.

7 On the theme of the Antichrist in lollard texts, see Curtis V. Bostick, The Antichrist and the Lollards: Apocalypticism in Late Medieval and Reformation England, Leiden, Brill, 2008.

8 Anne Hudson, The Premature Reformation, p. 385; John F. Davis, Heresy and Reformation in the Southeast of England 1520-1559, London, Royal Historical Society, 1983, p. 37

9 John Foxe, The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO, 1570 edition, HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011, available from: http//www.johnfoxe.org [last accessed 01/03/17], hereafter AM, p. 981; see AM, p. 988, p. 993. For the significance of the “Ave Maria” prayer in lollard literature, see Matti Peikola, “‘And After All, Myn Aue-Marie Almost To The Ende”: Pierce the Ploughman’s Crede and Lollard Expositions of the Ave Maria’, English Studies 81.4, 2000, p. 273-292.

10 For the role of the Doctrinale in the Reformation, see Kevin J. Alban, O. Carm, The Teaching and Impact of the ‘Doctrinale’ of Thomas Netter of Walden (c. 1374-1430), Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, p. 237-259.

11 For evidence of the influence of these texts on controversial writing in the sixteenth century, see Mike Rodman Jones, Radical Pastoral, 1381-1594, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011.

12 The former was printed in Basel in 1525 and the latter was printed along with a preface by Martin Luther. See Stephen E. LeHay, ed., Wyclif: Trialogus, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 23-25.

13 Anne Hudson, “‘No Newe Thyng”: The Printing of Medieval Texts in the Early Reformation Period,’ reprinted in Anne Hudson, ed., Lollards and Their Books, London, Hambledon Press, 1985, p. 227-248. Originally published in Middle English Studies Presented to Norman Davis, eds. Douglas Gray and Eric Stanley, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 153-174.

14 James Crompton, ‘Fasciculi Zizaniorum,’ Journal of Ecclesiastical History 12, 1961, p. 35-45, p. 155-166. Fasciculi Zizaniorum, Bodley MS e Musaeo 86; W.W. Shirley, ed., Fasciculi Zizaniorum, London, Longman, 1858.

15 Thomas S. Freeman, “William Swinderby,” section 5.18. in the critical commentary of The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online, hereafter TAMO. The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO, HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011, available from: http//www.johnfoxe.org [last accessed 01/03/17].

16 Thomas S. Freeman, “Archbishop Courteney’s persecution of Lollards,” section 5.20 in TAMO commentary.

17 Tanner, Norman, ed., Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31. London, Royal Historical Society, 1977.

18 Thomas S. Freeman, “Persecution in Coventry,” section 8.1 in TAMO commentary.

19 Thomas S. Freeman, “Archbishop Warham’s Persecution,” section 8.46, in TAMO commentary.

20 Thomas S. Freeman, “Persecution of Lollards,” section 7.3 in TAMO commentary.

21 Thomas S. Freeman, “Persecution in the Diocese of Lincoln,” section 7.6 in TAMO commentary.

22 John Bale, King Johan, ed. Barry B. Adams, San Marino, CA, The Huntington Library, 1969.

23 John Bale, The image of bothe churches after the moste wonderfull and heauenly Reuelacion of Sainct Iohn the Euangelist, contayning a very frutefull exposicion or paraphrase vpon the same, London, 1548, hereafter Image; Bale, The actes of Englysh votaryes, Antwerp, 1546.

24 John Bale, The first examinacyon of Anne Askewe lately martyred in Smythfelde, by the Romysh popes vpholders, with the elucydacyon of Iohan Bale, Wesel, 1546; Bale, A brefe chronycle concernynge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell, Antwerp, 1544.

25 On Bale’s influence on Foxe’s writings, see Thomas S. Freeman, John Bale’s Book of Martyrs? : The account of King John in Acts and Monuments,’ Reformation 3, 1998, p. 175-223.

26 Bale, Image, sig. A4v.

27 Richard Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth Century Apocalypticism, Millennarianism, and the English Reformation: From John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman, Oxford, Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978, p. 58.

28 Leslie P. Fairfield, John Bale: Mythmaker of the English Reformation, Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2006, p. 71; King, English Reformation Literature, 63; Gretchen E. Minton, “‘Suffer Me Not to be Separated, and Let my Cry Come unto Thee”: John Bale’s Apocalypse and the Exilic Imagination,’ Reformation 15, 2010, p. 83-97.

29 Bale, Image, sig. J4v.

30 Katharine R. Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 42; Fairfield, John Bale, p. 81.

31 Bale, Image, sig. S7v.

32 Image, sigs. S7v-S8r.

33 Image, sig. S8v.

34 Image, sig. T1v.

35 K. Firth, op.cit., p. 83.

36 AM, 515, hereafter AM. I am using the 1570 edition throughout this essay, for two reasons. First, it is the earliest edition with substantial lollard material (much more than in the first 1563 edition), and this material remained unchanged in the 1576 and 1583 editions, the last two editions published in Foxe’s lifetime. Second, Elizabeth Evenden and Tom Freeman have shown conclusively that Foxe edited the second edition the closest, having a greater hand in its overall compilation than in either the 1576 or 1583 editions. See Evenden, Elizabeth, and Thomas S.

Freeman, Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of John Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 311.

37 AM, p. 515.

38 AM, p. 514-522.

39 See above p. 3.

40 AM, p. 5, emphasis mine.

41 AM, p. 778.

42 Ibid., 979. Stilman’s praise of Wyclif might be understood better within the context of London lollards, many of whom evidently attributed saint-like qualities to their co-religionists. Although Stilman used the term “saint”, other London lollards understood their brethren as true martyrs, if perhaps not “saints”: Joan Baker referred to Jane Young as a “true martyr” and Baker herself was lauded by Richard Hunne. For Baker, see Ibid., p. 966; cf. LMA, Diocese of London, A/A/005/MS09531/009, fo. 25v, and Andrew Hope, “The Lady and the Baliff: Lollardy among the Gentry in Yorkist and Early Tudor England,” in Lollardy and the Gentry in the Middle Ages, eds. Margaret Aston and Colin Richmond, Stroud, Sutton, 1997, p. 250-277, here p. 260. For Hunne’s praise of Baker, see AM, p. 969-970.

43 AM, 634.

44 Foxe’s influence in framing the lollards as witnesses who appeared in the “time of Wyclif” is unmistakable in seventeenth-century antiquarian works, for example in Henry Cave’s Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum historia literaria, London, 1688, in which an appendix lists the works of authors written in the “Saeculum Wicklevianum,” p. 489-522.

45 AM, 574.

46 For example, “deuised (as the Registre sayth) by the lollardes”, (ibid., p. 620); “whome he falslye suggested to be lollardes & traytors to the church” (ibid., p. 629); “whiche is called the lollardes secte” (ibid., p. 717).

47 See Andrew N. Wawn, ‘Chaucer, The Plowman’s Tale, and Reformation Propaganda: The Testimonies of Thomas Godfray and I Playne Piers,’ Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 56, 1973-1974, p. 174-192.

48 AM, p. 679. Cf. Alexandra Walsham, “Inventing the Lollard Past: The Afterlife of a Medieval Sermon in Early Modern England,” JEH 58, 2007, p. 628-655.

49 John Bale’s Index of British and other writers, ed. by Reginald Lane Poole with Mary Bateson, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902, p. 74-78.

50 AM, p. 1004.

51 Ibid., p. 625; italics mine.

52 Euan Cameron, “Medieval Heretics as Protestant Martyrs” in Martyrs and Martyrologies, ed. Diana Wood, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p. 185-207.

53 AM, p. 544-545, quote at 545.

54 See Mary Dove, The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

55 See AM, p. 646-649.

56 Ibid., p. 648.

57 Ibid., p. 649.

58 AM, p. 984.

59 Ibid., p. 1263.

60 See John N. King, ‘“The Light of Printing”: William Tyndale, John Foxe, John Day, and Early Modern Print Culture,’ Renaissance Quarterly 54, 2001, p. 52-85.

61 When introducing the Buckinghamshire lollards, Foxe states: “And this [persecution] was before the name of Luther was heard of in these countreys amongest the people. Wherfore they are much begyled & misse informed, whiche condemne this kinde of doctrine now receaued, of noueltie, asking where was this Church and Religion 40. yeares ago, before Luthers tyme?” AM, p. 984.

62 AM, p. 545.

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